

Recommendations for ISBE for Early Childhood and Primary Teacher Certification

Overview

- Public Act 97-0604 outlines a new teacher certification structure that grants a professional educator license to all teacher candidates with specific endorsements covering age/grade levels and content areas. These content areas are to be aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), IL Professional Teaching Standards (IPTS), IL Social Emotional Learning Standards, and other national professional standards.
- In February 2011 ISBE convened Elementary and Middle School (EMAG) stakeholders to review current teaching and learning standards and to discuss restructuring IL teacher certification ranges in light of PA 97-0604. Some months later an early childhood stakeholder group was similarly convened.

Erikson Institute's Recommendation for Early Childhood and Elementary Endorsement Structure

- Erikson Institute strongly urges that the early learning endorsement continue to cover the birth – to 3rd grade span as has been the case with the Type 04 certification. A longstanding and growing body of research documents that this period constitutes a specific learning continuum during which children develop foundational skills in cognitive, emotional, physical, and social domains of growth.
- Grade overlap between endorsements covering K-3rd grades should be eliminated or minimized to ensure that early elementary students are taught by professionals with the knowledge and skills to build on previous experiences and successfully transition children into the intermediate grades. We recommend that elementary certification cover 2nd – 5th grade, leaving no more than two years of overlap between the early childhood endorsement and elementary. We oppose reducing the Type 04 to 1st or 2nd grade. Moreover, a reduction in the grade span for Type 04 certification would have a negative ripple effect on the ECE credential, both in terms of availability of training that covers that full birth-age 8 developmental span and for the ability of ECE professionals to move up levels of the early childhood certification ladder.

Rationale for Erikson's Recommendations

- Research has shown repeatedly that early childhood is a developmental period spanning birth through 3rd grade. This requires that teachers be expressly trained to engage young learners throughout this period, and ISBE has recognized this for many years through its current Type 04 certification.
- Gains made by children in high-quality birth-to-five programs are sustained when early learning programs and K-3rd have integrated structures including consistent instructional approaches, learning environments, and academic and social goals. Alignment is more effectively accomplished when early childhood and early primary teachers have similar preparation in using and adapting curricula, assessments, and learning guidelines with young children.
- Without knowing about the *past* and the *future* (the precursors to children's current development and learning and the trajectory they will follow in later years), teachers cannot design effective learning opportunities within their specific professional assignment. Teachers must have knowledge of development and learning; should be familiar with appropriate curriculum and assessment approaches; and should have in-depth knowledge and skills in at least two of the three periods: infants/toddlers, preschool/pre-kindergarten, and early primary grades.
- Students who don't read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to leave school without a diploma. Early learning teacher preparation programs emphasize foundational and emerging language, literacy, and reading skills. They are the teachers best prepared to help those students.
- Today's inclusive early childhood settings—those that include young children with developmental delays and disabilities—require knowledge of an even wider range of development and learning than was needed in many classrooms of the past.
- Close to half of children who are classified in IL as English Language Learners or dual language learners (DLLs) are between 0-8 years old. When DLLs enroll in early childhood classrooms, they come with a wide range of development in the home and second languages. Research has shown that developing a strong academic background in English, which is essential for the school success of DLLs, takes between five to seven years. Hence, teachers with in-depth understanding of the birth through eight continuum are in a particularly strong position to assist these students.